

Flooded

THE 5 BEST DECISIONS
TO MAKE WHEN LIFE IS
HARD AND DOUBT IS RISING

Nicki Koziarz



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To my husband, Kris.
May we never stop believing God for the impossible.

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A Letter to Flooded Readers

Hi.

Welcome to Flooded. The book that almost drowned me.

The night before I turned this book in to my publisher, I cried myself to sleep for the first time in years. Not because I was sad, grieved, or upset about this book. But because this has been the hardest thing I've ever done professionally. I wrote these words through the suicide of my brother, a worldwide pandemic, a national race crisis, plus a dozen other hard, personal things.

My head has felt anything but clear through this process. The craziest distractions met me every time I sat down at this keyboard to type, and doubt has lingered again and again. The Scriptures I unpack in this book were above my head, and I've never had to study something so hard to make sense of it.

This book is some of the most hard but holy work I've ever done.

I've written other books, but I want you to know a book on Noah was actually the first book idea I ever had.

I pitched a book on Noah about six years ago and got a resounding no from publishers. I didn't understand why . . . until now. In the book of Esther, one verse has turned into an anthem for seasons: For such a time as this (Esther 4:14). This message has felt a little too timely for this moment and beyond. And a little too raw for the places in life I've walked through while writing it. So no matter how much I wanted this concept published six years ago, I know now, this is the time. Because the timing of God is never rushed by the impatience of man.

I don't know what your life is looking like the day you begin holding this book in your hands, but I'm confident a few hard, impossible things are stirring doubt within you, because doubt isn't a seasonal struggle and doesn't come or go based on the temperature of our culture.

Doubt can only be removed by making the decision to do so.

And that is what we'll do through this book. We'll study closely the life of Noah and, based on his actions, unpack five decisions he made. These decisions are simple but hard. As the tears hit my pillowcase the night before turning this in, I had to remind myself to make these decisions, or else doubts about this whole process would indeed drown me.

I use these decisions daily. I have them written on a sticky note next to my computer, and they've helped me sort through these hard days with hope. On the other side of this book, you will be stronger, wiser, and able to deflect the detrimental things doubt can do to your soul.

I've divided this book into five sections. There are three chapters in each section. Take this one section at a time, because each section unpacks one of the five decisions. There are places for you to reflect and think throughout the book, but if you want to take the application and

study process deeper, I highly recommend grabbing the accompanying study guide and video series for this book.

I have a lot of hopes for you as the reader of this message, but my greatest hope is that God would meet you on these pages and change something deep in you that doubt has tried to destroy.

You all in?

Well, then, let's get going. . . .

Nicki

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DECISION ONE

To Walk with God

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CHAPTER 1

The Mess of You

What if I told you, it's *you*?
You are actually the greatest struggle you will ever have to overcome in your life.

Way to ease into this, right? I mean, usually these types of conversations have a more comfortable and slow beginning. But sometimes we just need someone to be honest and upfront with us about where we're at in our process and then get going with the plan to allow change to begin. I learned this the hard way, and I wish someone had sat me down and said these things I'm about to share.

There are days when it will feel as though life has been exceptionally unkind to you. If those hard days extend into a long season, life will try to convince you it has a new rhythm. One that makes you feel offbeat every step you take. Life can often feel like a bully, throwing punches at us we didn't see coming. We get taken out, for a moment. But how we jump back in becomes our decision.

A few months ago, I was dancing to that very offbeat, unkind rhythm of life, but I thought I was hiding it well. I cried

in private but praised in public. I smiled when I didn't want to. But I pulled away from the people who knew me best because I knew they would see it.

You know what it's like when an ache inside you won't leave, and it gets harder and harder to hide it? We buy the best beauty products our wallets allow, and we try to wear clothes to make us feel put together. But our lack-of-sleep-induced-bags under our eyes show we're not dancing through life like we thought we were.

It's those seasons when we post the yellow sticky notes on our mirror that say: FIND JOY TODAY. All in hopes that even though we are living in the valley of hard things, consumed with doubt, somehow we can hide it if we just put our mind in the right direction.

But living in doubt about your own faith and belief can change a person's countenance. So we fake it until we make it through. Because none of us want to be "that person," right? The person who always has an issue about something.

I thought I had people fooled.

Until.

I clicked "post" on a picture.

It was a picture of me with happy news. News I couldn't wait to share with my friends. I looked at the picture carefully before I posted it. Put just the right amount of a filter on it. It still looked like "me," but the filter provided a much better version of me, with smooth skin and color enhancement. You know, a girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do with her camera filters.

Within seconds of my posting the picture, a message popped into my direct messages. And it was a very unexpected response.

I knew the sender personally, and honestly expected her message to say, "So happy for you!" Or something cheerleader-ish like that. But her words stung.

"I can see it in your eyes, you're not okay. This isn't the Nicki we all love."

I was trying to share happy news, and that was her response? Frustrated, I deleted her message and “muted” all of her posts so I wouldn’t have to think about her for a long time. (Gosh, doesn’t social media make us act like we’re in sixth grade again? Super mature, Nicki.) But months later, as I looked back at the picture, I realized she wasn’t wrong. You *could* see it in my eyes. There was a sadness no filter could hide.

I know you’ve had those seasons when it just feels like hard things pile on top of each other. You are afraid to open your phone because every time you do, it’s another head-spinning situation to sort through. It was one of those.

In a two-year span, my mom had a six-month terminal battle with a brain tumor, my last living grandparent passed away, and my only brother tried to commit suicide four times. He lost his battle with mental illness and addiction soon after I began writing these words in this book.

There were a dozen other hard things to sort through, and it was hard day after hard day. They say your eyes are the window to your soul. My eyes were flooded with disbelief from a well of doubt deep in my soul.

Life felt like it was a daily gift of unwrapping disappointments. Isolation met me every morning. And the title of *Christian* felt very off-brand for me. Surely God saw how weary I was, right? Why wasn’t He doing anything about it?

Doubt had packed all my bags and taken me on the trip of a lifetime. Except it wasn’t a vacation on an exotic island—more like a TV show: *Vacation Nightmares*. I began to wonder if God really did care about all this hard stuff.

We all have to fight through hard days. But have your hard days left the lingering effect of doubt in your eyes?

At the end of hard days, it is still you versus you.

Sometimes we’re the mess. And sometimes we have to be the mop. No one will clean up these messy-soul places for us.

Godly strength
comes from
deciding to
rise above
the hard
and pursue
the holy.

The strongest people in my life are the ones who know how to win battles behind closed doors that no one knows about. They know how to rise above the hard and pursue the holy. And they know bad days do not equal a bad life.

You and I are about to become one of these people, because each of these five decisions in this book will lead us toward this goal. But just like with any goal, there will be challenges.

The Gift in Hard Days

Hard days can become the intersection of where *what was* and *what is* meets. The past often knocks on the door of the present to remind us of something we have forgotten about ourselves. Growth isn't always something new. It can be remembering what was covered up by the destruction of doubt.

A few weeks after I posted the picture and my friend made her comment, someone sent me a few pictures from my childhood. The past gently knocked on my door as I opened the package of pictures. Life looked pretty simple in those pictures, such a vast difference from the complicated life I'd find myself in thirty-five years later.

For a few moments, I was held hostage by one image. It was the little version of Nicki, with an undeniable presence of belief in that little girl's eyes. She was bossy too. Hands on her hips, a sassy smile, and eyes sending a wordless message: *Nothing is going to stop me.*

As I looked at the picture, I had to ask myself the hard question, Where is that belief-filled girl?

When was the last time you looked at a picture of yourself and saw the real you? Maybe you didn't even see the belief is gone.

You're waking up every day, going through the motions. Nothing is tragically wrong *today*, but you don't feel like yourself.

It feels like something's missing, and you can't quite put your finger on what's wrong. You find yourself looking in the mirror at a reflection that makes you feel lost.

Because maybe God has done some stuff we just don't like but we don't feel brave enough to admit it.

It's easy to trust God when our prayers are answered and life seems like a neatly folded pile of laundry. But when we don't like His ways, it's hard to trust His ways.

The good news is, Jesus has always been in the business of helping the lost become found. It's a gift to know He's here to find us in our mess and that He will help us clean up this messy-soul place.

Maybe your belief is just fine; I hope so. But if you're nodding your head yes to any of this . . . let's keep going.

**Just because
we don't like
God's ways
doesn't mean
we can't trust
His ways.**

Challenged to Change

If we're just meeting for the first time in these pages, besides being a woman who wrestles with doubt, I'm a wife and a mom. My husband, Kris, and I own a small farm just outside of Charlotte, North Carolina, that we call the Fixer Upper Farm.

We are first-generation farmers, which is a fancy way to say we have no clue what we're doing. But it's fun figuring it out. Our family is also in the process of adoption. I hope one day I'll be able to share more about it with you.

I also speak at churches and conferences.

One of my favorite places I've ever gotten to do this was in Haiti. And it came in the midst of that two-year battle of what felt like impossible, hard situations.

During one of the worship services, my doubt was challenged to change. If you've never heard Haitians worship before, it is truly one of the holiest things my ears have ever experienced.

While standing in this service worshipping with them before I was going to speak, my faith felt fake. I knew my mountain of doubt needed to come down.

One of the pastors shared this verse:

“Because of your little faith,” he told them. “For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

Matthew 17:20 CSB

Mustard-seed faith sounds so small. Doable. Easy. Right? And I thought I had it. But I couldn't seem to move any of the impossible mountains in my life. I have no official answers to offer you as to why.

Except, I held this Bible verse out of context and, honestly, not from a pure heart. Sometimes we just want to say to all our doubt, NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD. And then snap our fingers and watch life become all we dreamed it could be. But that's not how this verse works.

If we were to read all of Matthew 17, we would see Jesus was speaking to His disciples after they were discouraged with doubt because they couldn't heal a little boy. Jesus explains that their doubt blocked their ability to display God's power.

It's important to be curious enough to wonder why Jesus would use the example of the mustard seed to explain faith to His disciples. Side note: If you're not familiar with who the disciples were, to put it into modern terms, they were Jesus'

people. Twelve guys He was equipping and training to carry on His mission once He left this earth.

Jesus wasn't saying His disciples could move an actual mountain. He was speaking metaphorically and in terms they would understand. But isn't it neat that, even today, we refer to the big, hard things in life as mountains?

Jesus is still speaking our language.

The thing that's so fascinating about the mustard seed is what it can turn into and how fast it can grow.

According to the gardening website hunker.com, mustard seeds can sprout within three to ten days. They grow very rapidly, and the leaves can be eaten in salads. The longer they grow, the bigger they grow, up to forty-five inches high.¹

Jesus is telling His disciples it's not about the size of their faith. He's not necessarily looking for BIG FAITH, BIG DREAMS kinda people. He partners with people who have this little tiny spark of faith and, if planted right, can become something way beyond who they are. The ones who are willing to look at hard situations and say, "With God, it's possible." It's a quality of faith, not a quantity.

That day in Haiti, I sensed God was asking me to repent from fake faith. It was my challenge to change.

God's kindness in the midst of so much hard is often found in the most unusual ways.

Repentance is one of those places we can miss God's kindness. I've resisted that word, *repent*, for so long because my religious roots had some background where that word was very misused. But I found out one of the definitions of the word *repent* is "to change one's mind."

Unknowingly, based on my circumstances, I had changed my mind about some things about God. I had partnered with

Mustard-seed
faith isn't a
quantity
of faith; it's
a quality
of faith.

fear, anxiety, and doubt—things that make it hard to believe in God’s power.

And it would be my decision in that moment to re-change my mind. To remember God is who He says He is, despite what my circumstances say.

That is God’s kindness in this process. To allow us to experience changing our mind, again and again. God offers us this same kindness today.

What is something you might need to re-change your mind about God? _____

Change What You Choose

Repentance stops us from being a prisoner to doubt. It shouldn’t shame us, guilt-trip us, or make us feel worse about ourselves. Like that day in Haiti for me, in a moment, in a single day, everything can change for us because we seek repentance and gain a changed-by-God mind.

Once we know better, we should do better, right? But what we aren’t changing, we are choosing. I’m desperate for change and I know you are too.

There’s possibly another factor playing into this challenged-to-change struggle for you: isolation. I’ve wondered about those places where you push yourself into isolation because you can’t bear the thought of letting someone into this place with you.

You’re tired of Prayer Requester Patsy asking you what she can pray for, and you just keep looking at all your problems, thinking you shouldn’t bother. *It’s too messy. Too complicated. Besides, other people are dealing with more “serious” issues. I’m not worth the fuss of a prayer request.*

I get you. And I'm with you. But will you let others into this process with you too? Sometimes the hardest step we can take to change our minds is to ask others to help us get there.

People don't want to listen to complaining, but they are eager to listen to change. Stay close to people who love you enough to challenge you to change.

I have some solutions to offer you, not based on my experience, but on someone else's. Seeing this doubt-struggle clearly in my life, I did what this unlikely Bible teacher does best. I went to the Bible and found someone with a more impossible situation to overcome than we have.

I think sometimes we are looking for mentors, counselors, and pastors to help us (which isn't always bad), but we forget the countless people of faith in the Scriptures who have gone before us with the same struggles.

Before there was a Bible, there were people who demonstrated faith that changed the world through their belief based on what they didn't even know.

Today, we have a Bible in a world demonstrating faith by sitting with theology that settles our belief based on what we do know.

And it's not working.

About a thousand years ago, St. Anselm said, "I do not seek to understand in order that I may believe, but rather, I believe in order that I may understand." Not much has changed in the human heart searching for resolve with this struggle to understand.

I think we need to look back at a man who can teach us a few things about belief.

Noah.

Because of his obedience to God, humanity was saved.

Stay close to
people who
love you
enough to
challenge you
to change.

In most of the Scriptures we'll study, we don't actually have a lot of words from Noah. We can see his actions, though.

And actions stem from decisions. So, based on his actions—his obedience to God—we'll unpack five decisions we can make when life is hard and doubt is rising.

I'm not sure God is asking any of us, like He did Noah, to save humanity (thank goodness), but there's something hard He's asking us to believe Him through. And doubt will attempt to rise every step you take.

The problem is still going to be . . . you.

Will you let your belief-struggle come to the surface? Or will you keep stuffing it down like I did and mask yourself every opportunity you can get?

No beauty product, spa, or magic pill can put the spark of belief back in your eyes. Only Jesus can do that. And I know He wants to.

It's not too late. For any of us.

Where There Is Doubt

Some may want to say believing in yourself has nothing to do with believing in God. I say, wrong.

How we view ourselves is so intertwined with how we view God that we cannot separate the two. If one is off focus, they both are. Chances are, there are a few things in your soul that look a little blurry.

Hard seasons can cause us to look at God in an unhealthy way. Instead of asking God what He needs us to see in these seasons, we may constantly find ourselves asking Him if He really knows what He is doing. It's not our questions for God that lead to soul-unhealthiness, but rather our questioning of God.

My questioning often makes me wonder, *If God doesn't know what He is doing, how am I supposed to know what I am doing?*

This is what doubt will do to a person's soul.

Completely misconstrue it until it looks nothing like a soul that is confidently loved by God. And the valley of hard things will start to convince you that this is where life is to be lived. Get used to it.

But just because we are flooded with doubt doesn't mean we have to be destroyed by doubt. Where there is doubt, there is still hope, which is the way to rise.

God never promised us a life that was easy or simple. He promised to give us everything we would ever need to silence our doubts.

If you look at life and all you see is pain and sorrow, I think you're dealing with a heart wrestling with doubt. If you've settled for mediocre, comfortable, and expected, I think you're dealing with a heart wrestling with doubt. If God's told you to do something and it doesn't feel possible, I think you're dealing with a heart wrestling with doubt.

If you've tried all the pick-me-ups and self-help lists and motivational videos and nothing is working, it's time to try something different.

I had to figure out how to get that belief-filled girl back. And I did. I mean, she's still working on coming back, but she's a lot more here than she's not.

Your faith is still a mountain-moving faith. Doubt just made those mountains rise really fast. It's time to bring them down.

It's not our questions for God that lead to soul-unhealthiness, but rather our questioning of God.

CHAPTER 2

Disbelief to Unbelief

Until a few months ago, I'm not sure I could say I fully understood the difference between disbelief and unbelief. I also wasn't clear what either of those things had to do with doubt. But I've come to understand the conflict in our souls that never ends is the one between belief and unbelief.

Doubt is the dangerous place we linger in the middle of the battle between the two.

If we don't understand why we have to change our mind (repent) and make intentional decisions to deflect doubt, life will continue to feel hard and impossible. Those mountains will keep rising. And we'll keep looking at them in defeat.

Let's look at the definitions of these two words and find the connection to doubt. According to dictionary.com, here are the definitions of *disbelief* and *unbelief*:

Disbelief: the inability or refusal to believe or to accept something as true.

Unbelief: the state or quality of not believing; skepticism, especially in matters of doctrine or religious faith.

Disbelief seeks you out all day long with hard-to-believe news, stories, facts, and updates. And disbelief is always in our minds, tempting us to question both ourself and God as we look at the shocking world in front of us.

We know God offers us a mustard-seed quality of faith; we just don't know if it's possible for us. This is where doubt enters. Disbelief often brings doubt in our souls, which, if not dealt with, can lead to unbelief.

Disbelief → Doubt → Unbelief

Unbelief is what causes us to turn our souls away from God. It's the most dangerous place disbelief and doubt can lead to.

The “Why Bother” Mindset

I hope you like dogs, because we need to use mine as an example to understand all this. If God can use a donkey in the Bible (Numbers 22:22–31), He can use a pug in this book. Stick with me.

Herman, our pug, is a fluffy little fawn-colored guy. His wrinkles are just enough to make him look like a loaf of bread when he's lying down. He sits on the couch like a human, and to add to his human characteristics, he has recently started walking around the house with his dog bone in his mouth as if it's a cigar. *Have mercy.*

Herman can be kinda demanding, and it's our fault.

When Herman was a puppy, the vet let us know there were several ways we could feed him, the easiest option being to just let him eat when he's hungry. Keep food in the bowl and be done with a schedule. Works great.

But because of this system, occasionally someone (ahem, mostly yours truly) forgets to put Herman's food in his bowl.

And this makes him so annoyed.

Herman, in disbelief that there is no food in his bowl, will stand at his empty bowl and hit it with his paw until one of us comes to fill it up.

Herman doesn't struggle to believe we will put food in his bowl. Herman struggles with disbelief. He just cannot believe we don't remember to put the food in the bowl every single day. Still he shows up, wondering, *What kind of humans are they?*

The way you and I show up before God reveals where we are in this disbelief-to-unbelief process.

God doesn't get annoyed with our disbelief. But are we still showing up? Or have we stopped asking and seeking because we just can't believe God hasn't answered us?

Have we taken on a *why bother* mentality?

It's this place where we trusted God with our needs, desires, wants, or miracles. And we showed up every day believing God would do what we knew He could do. But for whatever the reason, God didn't do what we had hoped. And now we've stopped praying and believing. Because, *why bother?*

I resist people who try to explain God away. Have you ever heard someone say your prayers were not answered the way you hoped because you didn't believe enough? Or have you ever listened to someone try to make sense of a tragedy? The lack of compassion I see us sometimes have for the mystery of God is something no one wants to talk about.

I get it. We want answers to our disbelief. We want justice for our prayers. We want to comfort people by helping them make sense of things that make no sense.

There are times when answers to our prayers leave us in total disbelief.

I think about the time my friend Kristi and I found ourselves next to a hospital bed of a man who was dying too young. We

**Just because
God hasn't
answered us
doesn't mean
God's annoyed
with us.**

extended our faith and belief that God would heal him. We left his hospital room in total confidence. God was going to heal him.

And then the seed of disbelief met us that next morning when we heard he had died during the night. Honestly, because I believed so much in his healing, the next time I went to pray for someone, I had *unbelief*. Why bother to pray if God's going to do what He's going to do anyway?

And that's how it all happens. It creeps in. Step by step.

It's taken a lot of soul-searching to understand these places I've teetered on the edge of unbelief. It will for you too. But Noah's process with God helps us understand the need to recognize disbelief as it turns into doubt.

Through Noah's account, you will see that disbelief isn't necessarily wrong, but it will wreak havoc on your soul if it isn't dealt with by faith.

Second Corinthians 5:7 reminds us, faith is not about what we see in front of us because faith and sight often oppose each other.

... for we walk by faith, not by sight.

2 Corinthians 5:7

Let's begin unpacking Noah's assignment and what he teaches us about our first decision: to walk with God.

Decision One: To Walk with God

How This Went Down

Listen. I am not your theological expert girl. I don't use words like *propitiation*, *regeneration*, *exegesis*, or *infralapsarian*. (I'll wait for all my friends who need to go and Google those words. Me too, sis. Not that there is a thing wrong with people who do use those words.)

If that's you, high fives.

I love God and I study His Word, but I don't use words like that. But I know how to find people who do use those theological words like the above, and I know how to ask them questions to help us make sense of things in the Bible. And that's what I did as I studied Noah—asked people wiser than I am a lot of questions.

Sometimes we read something in the Bible and think it makes no sense and none of this could be possible. Which is exactly how I felt when I opened the pages of Genesis chapter 6 to learn about Noah.

It's a chaotic scene. People were doing all kinds of bad stuff. God was mad. And then God made a decision. He was going to just clear the table. Except it wasn't dishes. It was mass destruction.

So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them."

Genesis 6:7

There's a lot we need to see in this verse. God's anger, His disappointment with humanity, and His decision. If we were to back up just a few chapters in Genesis, we would see some of the things that happened to get humanity to this place.

Keep in mind, Genesis is the first book of the Bible, so we're only six chapters into this and the world's already a mess.

In Genesis 1, the world is perfect. In Genesis 2, God sees that Adam needs someone to make life more fulfilling—enter Eve. But in Genesis 3, sin enters the world through Adam and Eve's disobedience in eating from the forbidden tree. And then in Genesis 4, we see things get worse with Adam and Eve's children Cain and Abel. And then a bunch of time passes, and we see in Genesis 5 a lot of new generations come to be.

**Noah was
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he was far
from perfect.**

We don't see a play-by-play of what was happening during all that time, but it had to be really bad for us to arrive in Genesis 6:7 and read the words that God was grieved He had made humanity.

But why did God choose Noah for such a seemingly impossible assignment?

According to the Scriptures, the only perfect human who ever lived on this earth was Jesus. Because Jesus was both God and man. So Noah was a faithful person, but he was far from perfect.

Here are five other things we know for sure about Noah.

5 Things We Know about Noah

1. Noah came from a long line of faithful-to-God men. His grandfather was Methuselah, one of the oldest men to ever live (Genesis 5:27). Noah's father was Lamech. I've wondered if Noah ever had to think back on his family's faithfulness to keep going in his own belief.
2. According to Genesis 9:20, Noah was a farmer. (Ah. ME TOO. Okay. Not really.) If I've learned anything about farmers, it's how resourceful they can be. Still, Noah was NOT an ark-builder. This was a little out of Noah's realm of experience.
3. Noah was married, but we have no idea what his wife's name was. Moses wrote the verses we will be studying on Noah, but for whatever reason, this detail is left out.
4. Noah had three sons, and yes, we know their names: Ham, Shem, and Japheth (Genesis 6:10).
5. Noah preached his face off. (Okay, not really. This is just a thing we say in the South when a preacher moves the heart of people in a big way.) Noah is revealed as

a preacher of righteousness in 2 Peter 2:5. What does that mean? It means Noah spent a lot of his time telling people about the ways of God and how important it would be to follow Him.

A few things we know, a lot we don't. Now, let's unpack this belief assignment for Noah.

Noah's Belief Assignment

And God said to Noah,

“I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch.”

Genesis 6:13–14

Where was Noah when God met him with this ark assignment? We don't know.

But think of what life would be like for a farmer, husband, father, and preacher. I have a feeling Noah was just going about his business, and then in one moment, with one encounter with God, life as he knew it changed.

When was the last time your life dinged with a notification that caused you to stop and ask, Do I trust God with this?

Maybe it was a text from a friend asking for prayer, a panic-inducing headline from the news, or even an opportunity to do something totally new. All of us have had a moment when one update had the potential to change everything.

God sent the notification to Noah. And this is the part where I need more details about Noah's wife—because Kris Koziarz has come home with some big ideas before that I've hated to have to bring a dose of reality to. Sometimes he listens,

If you will
decide to keep
walking, God
will keep
working.

sometimes he doesn't. Which is why we have a fixer-upper tractor AND a fixer-upper boat sitting in our back field that have almost been the death of my sanity. It is enough to have a fixer-upper farm; we don't need anything else to fix, and I have to frequently remind him of this.

What on earth did Noah's wife say when he came home with this assignment from God?

Was she on board right away?

Did she raise her eyebrows?

Did she ask follow-up questions?

I doubt she was just like, "Sure, babe, whatever you say!" There had to be some disbelief stirring in her as well. Ultimately, she made it onto the ark, so she never got to the point where unbelief pushed her to the point of no return.

But I think there's a huge clue about how she and Noah arrived at this place of belief just a few verses before the verses of his assignment:

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. *Noah walked with God.*

Genesis 6:8-9 (italics added)

How was Noah able to rise above the doubt this assignment could have brought him? He made a decision: to walk with God.

This was not an out-for-a-few-laps-around-the-park kinda walk. It was a place in his soul where he became settled on who God was to him through a daily decision to show up before God. There was a destination Noah had in his life, and he would reach it only by walking with God.

Right now it may not be super clear where your destination is. You might just barely be surviving, and this all feels far off

for you. But if you will decide to keep walking, God will keep working.

It might feel like the enemy is following your footsteps and trying to trip you up every chance he gets. But with God, you are always one step ahead of any scheme to take you down.

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CHAPTER 3

Walk the Line, Barefoot

I think my brother, Mike, was the typical big brother. We grew up disliking each other, and I often found myself on the other side of his unusual “torture” tactics. Like the time he made me drink salt-and-pepper water, or he’d tell on me to my parents about something stupid I did. Despite our sibling quarrels, I always looked up to him.

I never dreamed that into our adult years, after not hearing from him for months on end, I’d find myself Googling his name to see if he was in jail or had made the news for some type of arrest or worse. Sometimes I’d even search death records to see if he was still alive.

I don’t know how exactly you find yourself doing things like this or writing words like these in a book. It seems surreal, like it shouldn’t be my life. And it shouldn’t. This shouldn’t be anyone’s story, but it is again and again.

There is a very specific time in each of our lives when we realize just how much we don’t believe in ourselves.

I'm not sure when that happened in Mike. But at some point, after many wrong turns, he decided life wasn't worth living.

Despite our attempts to help Mike, pointing him in the right direction and trying to help him see his worth, he couldn't see it. I don't know exactly what was going on inside him, but I know the battle kept getting fiercer.

And so, suicide harassed him. Again and again and again. Until finally it stopped making appointments with him because it fulfilled its commitment to destroy him. Or at least that's how it felt as I stood next to his hospital bed in Seattle one cold November morning.

I watched his body shut down from a bottle of pills. Heartbeat after heartbeat.

You could feel the judgment of the nurses and doctors and anyone else who entered the room. He was an addict. This wasn't his first time in their care. And I wondered if they felt their resources were being wasted on a human who didn't seem to care.

Our family had joked Mike was like the cat with nine lives. It amazed us how much he was able to live through. And so that morning as I spoke to the doctor on the phone and he said, "Nicki, I don't even know if you'll make it in time," I didn't believe him. Mike had pulled through times like this before, and I knew he had not fulfilled his purpose here on this earth.

Sometimes people say things like "When your time is up, it's up." While I agree God is sovereign and knows all, I don't believe suicide is ever part of God's plan for someone. Ever. And this is something I don't think we talk enough about. Because while God has a plan filled with good things, the enemy has a plan too. And his plan includes killing, stealing, and destroying (John 10:10).

Mike and I had the exact same upbringing. We went to church, our dad taught Sunday school, we prayed before meals, and holidays like Christmas and Easter were always about Jesus before us.

You can grow up in the church your entire life, know God, love God, and do all the God-things. But you still have to find your own way.

The Why That's in the Way

A bad accident years ago had left Mike questioning the goodness of God. He fell off a power line pole, broke his back, and was told he would never walk again. He did walk again, and his story was filled with so much hope.

But I believe his disbelief over what happened always made him wonder, *Why, God? Why me?*

While Mike physically learned to walk again, walking with God became harder and harder. Eventually, it just all became too much. He was past the point of no return. His destructive decisions had become too much of who he was.

I believe with everything in me that Mike is in heaven today. His battle with choices and mental illness did not define his eternity.

But I'm left here in the aftermath of losing him too soon. With prayers for his life that feel unanswered. And sometimes I still can't believe he's really gone, even though I saw his heart rate monitor flatline with my own eyes.

My given name, Nichole, means victory. And since I discovered the meaning of my name, I have always tried to speak into people from the place of victory. But this time? I am coming to you from a place of defeat. Not the kind of defeat that comes from quitting. Goodness, I already wrote the book on that. This kind of defeat comes regardless of everything you did right. It messes with you because it doesn't make sense. You just can't believe it.

This kind of defeat changes you. And if we don't allow it to sit with us and just sweep it under the rug instead, it can define us.

God can
handle your
disbelief. And
He will help
you believe
again.

As grief and loss have met me the last few years in the most uninvited ways, some people tried, with the best intentions, to hold out their hand to me. But they said things like “God *did* answer your prayers, just not the way you asked Him to.”

Their words only left me more doubtful and full of more disbelief. What I really needed was someone to look at me and say, “Nicki, God can handle your disbelief.

And He will help you believe again.”

If that’s you today, looking at life, full of doubt, I say those words to you: God can handle it, and He will help you believe again.

Disbelief loves for us to become spiritual victims of our circumstances. It knows that if it can hold us hostage, the next time our faith is stretched, doubt will appear. And if doubt wins, unbelief is soon to follow. And then? It’s often the point of no return.

Each of us has a *Why, God?* that needs to be dealt with. So here’s where we start: We tell God our *why* that is in the way of walking with Him. This *why-wedge* between you two, it needs to be gone.

This is hard soul-work. Work that won’t make the enemy happy. And you may find yourself more frustrated than faithful right now. And that’s okay. Just keep turning the page and we’ll get there, together.

The Walking Out of Belief

According to yourdictionary.com, the idiom “walk the line” means to “maintain an intermediate position between contrasting choices, opinions, etc.” The term can be traced back all the way to the 1700s when inmates were made to walk around a

thick-lined circle for their “rec time.” If a prisoner was found walking off the line, he was punished.

The phrase is used today in multiple ways, including song titles and even as the title of a movie about Johnny Cash. Some people use “walk the line” to make a strong point, like *get yourself together*.

Lines show up everywhere and represent so many things. Think about how many lines you encounter in a week. Lines we wait in at the grocery store, lines to pick up our kids from school, lines that divide land.

Lines are fragile, though.

And they can easily be crossed, forgotten about, or even totally missed.

In our culture today, it’s not clear what it means to walk with God. There is a thin line between the ways of this world and the ways of our God. A large portion of our world believes in God but does not consider the Bible absolute truth.

According to the Pew Research Center, most of America (90 percent) believes in some type of “higher power.” So belief is there. But where we start to divide rapidly is that only 56 percent of those who believe in a higher power believe in the God of the Bible.¹

As Pew Research dug even deeper into the research, they found 69 percent of the Baby Boomer generation believes in the God of the Bible. Sixty-four percent of Generation X believes. Fifty-four percent of older millennials believe, and 50 percent of younger millennials believe in the God of the Bible.

Since my kids are part of Generation Z, I’m very curious what future stats will say. So far, research shows an incredibly rapid decrease in belief for this generation, and honestly, as a mom, I see it. I even own my responsibility in it. This generation

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Belief in God by Generational Group²

% of adults who say they believe in God . . .

Generation	Absolutely Certain	Fairly Certain	Not Too/Not at All Certain	Don't Know	Do Not Believe in God	Other/Don't Know If They Believe in God
Younger Millennial	50%	21%	9%	< 1%	17%	3%
Older Millennial	54%	22%	7%	1%	13%	3%
Generation X	64%	20%	5%	< 1%	9%	2%
Baby Boomer	69%	18%	4%	1%	6%	2%
Silent	71%	16%	4%	2%	6%	2%
Greatest	66%	15%	4%	5%	7%	3%

is incredibly hard to speak Truth into. The church has changed, culture has changed, family units have changed, and the changes have caught most of us off guard.

We are all constantly being flooded with messages that counteract Truth. We look more at screens than we do into eyes. Anxiety is at an all-time high. Opinions are all over the internet. Temptation to doubt God is at every corner of our lives.

The thing is, this isn't new.

When I open up the biblical account of Noah, I see a world in spiritual chaos. Sin. Darkness. Confusion. Anger. Destruction. Evil. The same things we find our world swirling in today. It's a hard reality to swallow, but not much has changed in the hearts of humans since the days of Noah.

But there was one man who found a way around the chaos of humanity by doing something you and I can do today: walk with God. If it wasn't impossible for Noah, it's not impossible for you and me. But it's going to take courage to stop looking at the world around us with a blaming finger and look within.

We can blame the internet, phones, our schools, and even our churches all we want for the way Truth has been compromised. But if we're not willing to start with ourselves, what are we doing?

Walking with God shouldn't look like it did for those prisoners in the 1700s walking the line in a prison yard. If we cross the line, there's always a way back. Maybe we just need to decide to get back on the line.

Noah teaches us to make the decision to walk with God. But I want to add something to this. To get even closer to God, may we walk *barefoot*.

Take Your Shoes Off

Shoes are good. In fact, very rarely will you ever see me walking barefoot. I just love how shoes feel on my feet. I don't want cold floors messing up my comfy vibe in the winter. Flip-flops in the summer always feel right.

I also do not really like feet.

I don't like looking at feet while at the beach. And please, oh please, for goodness' sake, DO NOT take your shoes off on an airplane. I also tend to lose my cool when my family and I are cozied up on the couch watching a movie and one of them slides their naked feet onto my side of the couch.

STOP IT.

And put some socks on.

Despite my feelings about feet, did you know there are medical professionals who have the opinion that walking barefoot outside is actually good for you? If we want to get fancy with a hipster term, it's called "earthing."

Apparently, all that stuff in the soil and grass has good minerals for your body that your feet absorb when you walk. It's suggested by these pros to walk outside, barefoot, a few minutes a day to get the earth's mineral benefits for your body.

I don't know. I'm sure there's some truth to this. I'm just not ready to start identifying with the group urbandictionary.com calls the nelipot and hit the ground running, barefoot.

But I do think there's something important to understand about this.

There's a connection we can make from Noah to another man in the Bible: Moses.

Moses was an unlikely leader in the Scriptures who, like Noah, also received what probably seemed like an impossible assignment from God. Moses got his first assignment from God while standing in front of a burning bush. God was speaking through the fire, but before Moses received any instructions, God gave him a command:

“Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

Exodus 3:5

There are many opinions why God would say this to Moses. But basically, it was a stance of humility and honor for the presence of God.

Moses didn't argue with God. He just took off his shoes and listened to the rest of what God had to say. The wild thing is, as I've been studying the passages in the Bible about Noah, I see something so similar. Until the very ending of the account of Noah, we never actually see Noah say anything in the text.

Scripturally, it is revealed to us as a pretty simple process. God commands, Noah listens. And repeat.

Is it possible we're experiencing unbelief in our lives because we haven't been willing to take a posture of humility? Maybe you're thinking, *Well, if God spoke to me through a burning bush or told me exactly what to do like He did with Noah, this would be a lot easier to figure out.* Agreed.

The reality is, this process is hard. We don't understand it all. Maybe we've never done this work in our souls before. I mean, even Noah was tasked to do something he had never done before.

Just like the hipster medical professionals telling us the benefits of walking barefoot outside, Moses is showing us the benefit of standing "barefoot" before the Lord. It's good for us.

Later, Moses would also build an ark (Exodus 25:10), much different from Noah's, but with a very similar purpose: God's grace in the midst of hopeless and hard.

When I think about everything that has led me to not believing in myself and in God, a lot of it has to do with pride. Here's the problem with pride: We tend to think of it as being this macho-mega-mouthy person.

But pride can also be the quiet, standing to the side, fearful soul. Too much humility is also pride. Whenever we make our ways or our words higher than those of God, we have fallen into pride.

So we're going to have to "take off our shoes" and humbly clear the way for whatever is standing between us and the holiness of our God, and it's going to feel uncomfortable.

And this is the decision you need to make in the midst of hopeless and hard: *Will you keep walking with God?*

Whenever
we make our
ways or our
words higher
than those
of God, we
have fallen
into pride.

Getting a Grip

I'm sure I was looking up something for our farm one day on YouTube when I randomly found a fascinating video about a woman named Faith Dickey.

Faith is what's called a "slackliner." At first, it might seem like she's just a tightrope walker, but she does a much more difficult version, something called "high-lining." It's walking on a flat, braided slack line across an extreme height through mountains like the Alps. Crazy!

What's extra interesting is that Faith does these incredible walks from one peak to another on a braided flat rope barefoot. Even in extremely cold temperatures, there she is, walking barefoot across an open space.

Most people who do high-lining do it barefoot. Bare feet tend to have the greatest grip on the line.

Many people are willing to say they will walk with God. But few have a grip on what it means. Noah had to have such a tight grip on this assignment that even while the rest of the world was falling apart, he wasn't.

Same for us.

I think this is what's needed in our generation today. We need people who stand out to the rest of the world. I'm not talking about taking a high-and-mighty stance and declaring to the world, I WILL NEVER WATCH THE BACHELOR, AND I AM NOT DOING THE TIKTOK. You do you. And you hold tight to what you need to hold tight to.

But, here's the not-so-shocking news . . .

We all have our things and thoughts that make us look less like Jesus. And unbelief just seems to be the acceptable, forgotten, and unrecognized sin-struggle. But it

**Faith is faith,
no matter
how small.**

will be what brings disobedience to our stories again and again.

If we get the right grip, we'll be like Faith Dickey, walking from this mountain to the next.

I truly believe if faith was possible for Noah, it's possible for us. Even if it looks like a tiny mustard seed, faith is faith, no matter how small.

Each of our assignments of faith will look different. To some, it's going to be getting a grip on Truth for the first time. For others, it's going to be getting a grip on our emotions, habits, thought patterns, or words we speak.

But for all of us, it's going to be getting a grip on the daily practice of moving across the line from one mountain to the next and strengthening our faith. This is what it means to daily make a decision to walk with God.

I want you to think back to the *why* that's in your way. As we close out this chapter and section of the book, here's a prayer for us:

God, thank you that I don't have to stay in the place of disbelief, doubt, or unbelief.

Thank you for the power, authority, wisdom, and goodness Jesus brings to all situations, including mine.

So right now, I confess unbelief has convinced me that

I repent from this thought pattern.

And I ask that you give me mustard-seed faith over this situation. I will keep walking with you.

In Jesus' name, amen.